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ABSTRACT

Moral education, a primary component of Japanese education, has no precise equivalent in Canadian education. The focus of moral education is development of personal attitudes and social values. The content of this discipline is a kind of secular humanism which has engendered in the postwar Japanese the values, attitudes, behaviors, and virtues that have propelled them into the 21st century without the social and political disruptions that have plagued other modernizing nations. Moral education is allotted 34 to 35 hours per school year in grades one through nine. Teachers receive national guidelines for moral education. The many objectives for this discipline include respect for life, good manners, personal hygiene, individual freedom, respect for the advice of others, and rationality. Moral education is infused into such physical education activities as kendo and karate, into student-teacher interaction, and into social studies. The teaching of moral education in Japan offers many valuable lessons for the Canadian educational system. (LP)

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MORAL EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS OF JAPAN

by
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Moral Education in the Schools of Japan

Paul F. Thomas

The Geopolitical Context

Thanks to an invitation from the Japan Institute for Social and Economic Affairs (JISEA), I recently had an opportunity to observe at first hand some of the workings of both the public and the industrial education system of Japan. JISEA is an arm of Keidanren—a federation of all major Japanese economic interests whose mission is to achieve cohesion in the pivotal spheres of Japanese national life, especially those pertaining to long-range economic development, foreign-policy formulation, and international public relations. That such an organization can exist, when its equivalent is not to be found in any other major non-totalitarian industrial nation, attests to an extraordinary level of voluntary co-operation for a free-enterprise society.

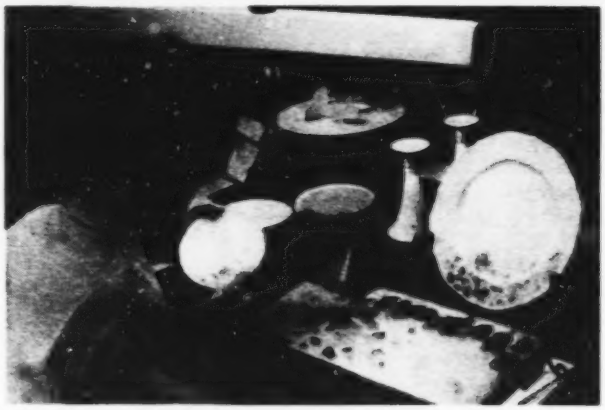
Would that Canadians could achieve such a high level of "togetherness" and national purpose! The Japanese can teach us much in that respect, of which more shall be said later.

Because of their susceptibility to various natural disasters such as earthquakes, tidal waves, typhoons, and volcanic eruptions, their experience as the victims of nuclear holocaust, their lack of natural resources, and their dependence upon the freedom of the seas, the contemporary Japanese can be said to have a *vulnerability complex*. This complex has been exacerbated by Japan's astounding achievements in technological and economic development in that such successes incur the jealousy and protectionistic backlash of less successful, but presumably more experienced industrial nations being beaten at their own game of so-called, capitalistic free-enterprise. To prevent the recurrence of the full cycle of events that led to World War II, the Japanese, instead of creating a bamboo curtain, are wisely inviting foreigners into their domain to observe their ways—"peace through understanding."

Moral Education

Meaning of the term

The precise English equivalent for the Japanese *moral education* does not exist. Their concern is not really with *morality* as Westerners understand the notion. There is no catechism in Japanese moral education. Nor does it have any theological underpinnings. The concern is with personal attitudes and their behavioral consequences—social virtues. Values are not laid on, nor are they "clarified" as we understand that term. They are both carefully defined and undefined (the peculiarities of Japanese language allow one to do both simultaneously). The result is a species of secular humanism engendering the values, attitudes, behaviors, and *virtues* that have propelled the postwar Japanese into the 21st century without incurring the social and political strains that have plagued many other nations that have tried to ride the fast escalator to modernization.



A prime purpose of moral education is to produce workers imbued with a consummate pride in their craftsmanship. Here, an artist at Noritake Pottery applies decorative touches to the world's best-selling brand of dinnerware.

A lesson for Canadians

Who would have thought in 1945 that Japan would so quickly resurrect itself, phoenixlike, from the ashes of war to achieve, 40 years later, a per capita income that surpasses even that of the United States? The various factors behind this meteoric ascent are delineated in our better textbooks. One consideration is that of *national morale*, which is nurtured by the *national* (not provincial) educational system in general, and the schema for moral education in particular. One of the most striking aspects of this national moral attitude is the value that is put on the *individual*. This value is paradoxical in a collectivistic society characterized by the well-known Japanese saying, "If a nail sticks out, it must be pounded down." We must remember that the Japanese mind is largely infused by Zen (Japan's answer to Taoism) and is therefore able to reconcile paradox. Individuals are regarded as national treasures to be developed to the maximum of their potential so that the entire nation may benefit from the aggregate of individual development. Thus in Japan, one-third the area of British Columbia, are 140 million persons, each of whom is a jewel of great price that must be polished to perfection.

Canada, on the other hand, has 27 times the area of Japan, vastly greater natural resources of every description, and only 25 million people (about one-sixth the Japanese figure). Many Canadians regard other Canadians as disposable resources to be discarded when their exploitation is no longer profitable to business and industry. Heaven forbid that our pyramid of governments should formulate a policy for human resource development. Indeed, as Walt Kelly's *Pogo* would say, "We have seen the enemy and he is us." In this respect, we are barbarians compared to the Japanese; but they are too polite to tell us so.

Japanese moral education is rooted in the traditional precepts of Buddhism and Confucianism.

Place in the Japanese school timetable

As evident from Table 1, moral education—or *virtues education* as we might call it—is allotted 34 to 35 hours per school year for each of Grades 1 to 9, throughout every publicly supported school in the country. The class times for this "virtues education" must be specified in both student and teaching timetables. *In addition*, provision is made for pedagogical application of virtues education in the various other school subjects as well as in the school's extra-curricular program, which is quasi-informal. This application reaches its apogee in social studies and special activity sessions, about which more will be said later.

A national curriculum

Japan has a unitary educational curriculum, which emanates from the office of the national ministry in Tokyo. All schools and all teachers receive the same central directives and guidelines. The regional school districts, known as prefectures, are at liberty to flesh out the guidelines according to their own lights. Teachers, in turn, have the deciding voice as to what methodologies will be employed in their classrooms.

Objectives for moral education: Grades 1-6

The guidelines, which each teacher at this level receives, are accompanied by a contextual preamble and rounded out by a series of applicational suggestions for the teachers' consideration.

The stated objectives are *based on the law of the land*, to wit the Fundamental Law of Education and the School

TABLE 1
School Hours for Selected Subjects from Grade 1 to Grade 9

Subject	Elementary School						Lower Secondary School[a]		
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9
Japanese language	272	280	280	280	210	210	175	140	140
Social studies	68	70	105	105	105	105	140	140	105
Moral education	34	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Special activities[b]	34	35	35	70	70	70	70	70	70
Other core subjects[c] and electives	442	490	525	525	595	595	690	665	700
Total number of school hours	850	910	980	1015	1015	1015	1050	1050	1050

[a]The actual Japanese designation is "Grades 1, 2, and 3 of lower secondary school."
[b]Exclusive of music, arts and handicrafts, homemaking, physical education, fine arts, and industrial arts.
[c]Arithmetic, science, mathematics, and the subjects indicated in note b, above.

Source: Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Education Act. The intended relationship of moral education to all other subjects and to daily life is unequivocally iterated with the following words (the translation is literal, rather than polished English):

> "In the class of Moral Education, instruction should be given so as to develop pupils' ability to practise morality by maintaining close relations with moral education conducted in the class of each subject and in special activities, and supplementing, intensifying, and integrating this moral education through systematic and developmental instruction, by enhancing pupils' ability to make moral judgment, by enriching their moral sentiments, and by seeking improvements in their moral attitudes and the willingness to practice them."

The complete *list of objectives* (Grades 1-6) is as follows (again, the translation is literal rather than polished):

1. To hold life in high regard, to promote good health, and to maintain safety.
2. To observe good manners, and to live in an orderly manner.
3. To keep oneself neat and tidy, and to make good use of goods and money.
4. To act according to one's own beliefs and not to be moved unreasonably by others' opinions.
5. To respect another's freedom as well as one's own and to be responsible for one's own acts.
6. To act always cheerfully and sincerely.
7. To love justice and hate injustice and to act righteously with courage.
8. To endure hardships and persist to the end for the accomplishment of one's right aims.
9. To reflect upon oneself by listening attentively to the advice of others and to act with prudence and live an orderly life.
10. To love nature and to have affection toward animals and plants with a tender heart.
11. To esteem beautiful and noble things and to have a pure mind.
12. To know one's own characteristics and to develop one's strong points.
13. To be always filled with aspiration, to aim toward higher goals, and to strive for their realization.
14. To think about things in a rational way and always to have an attitude of inquiry.
15. *To apply one's original ideas* and to cultivate actively new fields.
16. To be kind to everybody and to care for the weak and the unfortunate.
17. To respect those who devote themselves to others and to appreciate their work.
18. To trust in and to be helpful to one another.
19. To be fair and impartial to everybody without prejudice.
20. To understand others' feelings and positions and to forgive others' faults generously.
21. To understand the rules and the significance of making rules by oneself and to follow them willingly.
22. To assert one's rights properly and to perform one's duties faithfully.
23. To appreciate the value of work and to co-operate actively in the service of others.
24. To take care of public property and to protect public morality with a full awareness of being a member of society.
25. To love and respect all members of one's family and to strive to have a good home.
26. To love and respect people at school and to strive to establish good school traditions.
27. To love the nation with pride as a Japanese and to contribute to the development of the nation.
28. To have proper understanding of the love toward the people of the entire world and to become an individual who can contribute to the welfare of humankind.

The applicational suggestions in the ministerial guidelines stress the importance of obtaining home and community support for the objectives, which are to be "prepared according to the realities of the local region . . . and should be treated with flexibility and not to be viewed as fixed."

Pupils receive a grade for their moral efforts, but teachers are reminded that "it is not proper to apply the rating method used for [core] subjects with respect to the evaluation of the attainment of [personal virtues]."

Grade 10 students preparing for Kendo practice. *Kendo, tea-ceremony, flower arranging, and other traditional activities are really variants of Zen meditation which underpins much of Japanese "moral" outlook.*

The relationship of moral education to special activities and social studies

The relationship of moral education to physical education and extra-curricular activities such as Kendo, Karate, and tea ceremony are just what one would expect. The domain of *special activities* includes homeroom period, school assemblies, excursions, and other special events. The activities are not completely analogous to their North American counterparts because of their far greater *ceremonial content*. For example, homeroom period is termed *classroom assembly*, which is marked by formal bowing to the teacher and to one another. Students, of course, also bow to the teacher at the end of every class. After the end of the last class of the day, a formal clean-up period ensues, wherein the pupils sweep the floors, vacuum the carpets, clean the blackboards, wash the windows, and perform all other non-technical clean-up chores that would be attended to by janitorial staff in the North American schools. It is simply inconceivable to the Japanese that adults should clean up after youngsters.

At all grade levels, students do all the school clean-up chores—such as sweeping floors, vacuuming carpets, and washing windows. The idea of adults having to clean up after children, as in North America, strikes the Japanese as ridiculous.

As far as the social studies are concerned, Japanese teachers are adept at using both the classroom and the community as first-hand, microcosmic representations of society and the world at large. For example, classes do not merely talk about conservation and ecology. Students also plant trees and cultivate their own garden plots in the school yard.

The following are specific examples of social studies objectives requiring the understanding or practice of a moral virtue. They are taken at random from a curriculum outline developed locally, by the primary division of a school in the city of Oita, on the island of Kyushu.

Grade 2

- "Students know the necessity of picking the side-buds of the young potato and of giving fertilizer to the soil so that a rich harvest may be lovingly cultivated."
- "When reading a library book that is referred to by many persons, students know that they must wash their hands and neither scribble on nor bend the corner of any page."

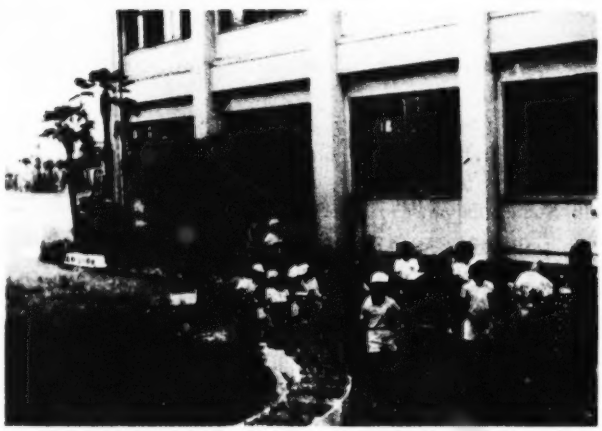
Grade 3

- "Students become aware of the way to buy goods after learning to distinguish between stores. The various kinds of shopping performed by the household of each student in the class are tabulated."
- "On a rainy day students have a good and delightful time with indoor games that are chosen and devised by themselves."

In the higher grades, such examples can be multiplied many fold.

A Parting Shot

Such then are the virtues of Japanese moral education. The lessons for Canada are evident. Social studies teachers believe that from the study of other cultures, valuable ideas, applicable to one's own milieu, may be gleaned—and vice versa. The Japanese, of course, have learned a great deal from North America. Whether or not we, as a society in our turn, will learn anything from the Japanese is a moot point. Certainly we need to believe that we will. The Japanese way is not one of theologizing, moralizing, or intellectualizing about stages of moral development. That is what makes it so hard for us to follow.



Japanese primary school pupils practise conservation instead of talk about it. Each pupil is assigned a garden plot which must be tended lovingly.

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